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ABSTRACT

Preliminary findings are presented to address the issue of the extent to which measures of external locus of control, contraception use, educational achievement, and religiosity discriminate between black unmarried adolescent fathers and nonfathers. Forty-eight unmarried adolescent fathers and 50 unmarried adolescent nonfathers were identified by social service workers. Data were collected by an adult black male interviewer in a face-to-face private interview. Questions pertained to the social and demographic characteristics of the subjects; their sexual knowledge, attitudes, and practices; the problems they encountered as adolescent males; and the ways they coped with their problems. Results indicate that if a black adolescent male's locus of control, contraceptive use, church attendance, and school status are known, his status as a father can be predicted. Policy implications of this research include the suggestion that unmarried black adolescent fathers should be given birth control counseling and, if other forms of counseling are warranted, attention should be paid to issues of locus of control. Concluding remarks point out weaknesses of the study limiting its generalizability. (RH)

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Some Social and Psychological Factors Associated with Black Unmarried Adolescent Fatherhood: A Preliminary Report*

by

Leo E. Hendricks, Ph.D.**

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Abstract

This paper presents preliminary data that addresses the issue of whether and to what extent measures of the variables external locus of control, contraception use, educational achievement, and religiosity can be used to discriminate between 48 Black unmarried adolescent fathers and 50 single Black adolescent non-fathers. The data were subjected to a linear discriminant function analysis to accomplish this task. Results indicated that if you know a Black adolescent male's locus of control, contraceptive use, church attendance, and school status, you can predict his status as a father. Policy implications from this research indicate that unmarried Black adolescent fathers should be given birth control counseling, and if other forms of counseling are warranted, attention should be paid to issues of locus of control.

Introduction

The need for greater understanding of social and psychological factors associated with unmarried adolescent fatherhood are of increasing concern (Meyerowitz and Malev, 1973; Chilman, 1979; Earls and Siegel, 1980; Phipps-Yonas, 1980). Despite this concern, the available literature would suggest little is known about those factors that distinguish single adolescent males who become fathers from those who do not (Pannor and Evans, 1965; Parker, 1971; Robbins and Lynn, 1973). What is known about the differences between fathers and non-fathers, tend to be social and demographic (Card and Wise, 1978; Elster and Panzarine, 1981). As an attempt to address this bothersome gape in the litreature, this paper presents preliminary data that addresses the differences between variables external locus of control, contraception use, educational achievement, and religiosity. These particular variables were chosen because they have been reported to be associated with adolescent childbearing (Chilman, 1980).

Methods

The study was conducted during July, 1979 in Columbus, Ohio. Prior to the selection of the study population, the term "unmarried adolescent father" was defined as an unwed male who was a father or an acknowledge father-to-be and under the age of 21 years. An unwed adolescent non-father was determined to be a male adolescent who was reported not to be a father or a father-to-be under the age of 21. In addition to these eligibility requirements, the subjects were required to be residents of Columbus. The young fathers and their controls were matched as

closely as possible for age and residential location. It will be pointed out that it was not known whether the girlfriend, of the males comprising the control group, had conceived but had had an abortion or miscarriage.

Forty-eight unmarried adolescent fathers and fifty adolescent males who were reported not to have fathered out-of-wedlock children were selected and identified by the social service workers from the Bethune Center for Unwed Parents. The process was facilitated by the unwed teenage mothers enrolled in the Bethune Center. This agency provides non-residential comprehensive health, education, and social services for the pregnant adolescent and her baby.

Participation on the study was voluntary. Subjects were paid a $10.00 incentive to participate. Potential subjects were informed they would be paid for an interview. Potential subjects were informed by letter, telephone, and word-of-mouth in areas densely populated with Blacks, including places where Black youths were known to frequent. The respondents were selected in a nonproability manner and do not constitute a representative sample of unmarried Black adolescent fathers or nonfathers.

Data were collected by an adult Black male interviewer in a face-to-face private interview at the Bethune Center. Questions pertained to the social and demographic characteristics of the population, their sexual knowledge, attitudes, and practices, and the problems they encountered as adolescent males along with ways they coped with their particular concerns. Each subject was informed that all interview information would be kept confidential

and anonymous. The subjects were told they could refuse to answer a question or discontinue their interview at any time.

Measurement of Variables

External Locus of Control

In order to tap the subject's sense of external locus of control, they were asked two questions: (1) "Do you feel that you can do very little to change your life?"; and, (2) "Do you feel that it is mostly luck if one succeeds or gets ahead?" These questions were taken from a study conducted by Meyerowitz and Male (1973) concerning attitudinal factors in adolescent pregnancy. They represent the two strongest items of the author's external locus of control variable that was arrived at through factor analysis. Fifty percent of the variance was explained by this variable. It is expected that the subjects tending to answer these questions in the affirmative are more likely to be involved in premature sexual activity leading to pregnancy than are subjects who answer these questions in the negative.

Contraception Use

To assess contraception use among the subject, they were asked, "When you have sexual intercourse, do you use contraception?" Data was not gathered about the frequency of sexual intercourse in this study. It is expected that the unmarried adolescent fathers will be likely to protect their sexual partners during sexual intercourse than will their counterparts.

Educational Achievement

To address the issue of educational achievement, the subjects were asked, "What type of school are you going to now?" In addition, the subjects were asked to give information on the number of years of school they had completed. Because of their fatherhood status, it was thought that the unmarried adolescent fathers were less likely to be attending any type of school than were their controls.

Religiosity

It has been pointed out that religiosity may be defined in terms of the degree of participation of an individual in religious activities. (Theodorson and Theodorson, 1969). With this definition in mind, the young fathers and their controls were asked, "Are you an active member of any church?" A negative response to this question was construed to mean a low level of religiousness on the part of the subject.

Results

Two inter-related analyses of the data will be reported here; one deals with the differences between fathers and nonfathers, the other with contraceptors and non-contraceptors irrespective of fatherhood status.

Fathers and Nonfathers

The social and demographic traits of the subjects are shown in Table 1 and 2. It will be observed in those tables that the unmarried adolescent fathers and their matched counterparts were more similar than they were different on the sociodemographic variables selected for this study. Even so, two significant differences were found between them. First the data revealed that

the young fathers were more likely to be employed than were their controls ($P = .04$). Secondly, it was shown that the fathers were more likely to be out of school than were the nonfathers ($P = .001$).

The major study variables locus of control, contraception use educational achievement, and religiosity were analyzed separately, to determine any differences between the fathers and non-fathers, prior to examining their combined effects in determining the differences between the fathers and non-fathers. These analyses are summarized in Tables 1,2, and 4.

External Locus of Control Variable

As noted earlier, two questions were used to assess the subjects' sense of external locus of control. Their response to these questions revealed that the unmarried adolescent fathers were more likely to feel that their destiny was controlled by chance, fate, and other people than were their controls (Table 3). More specifically, the fathers versus the non-fathers tended to feel that (1) they could do very little to change their life ($P < .05$); and, (2) it was mostly luck if one succeeded or got ahead ($P < .001$).

Table 3 About Here

Educational Achievement Variable

Although no statistically significant difference was found between the fathers and their controls with respect to years of school completed, there was, however, a striking difference in terms of whether they were attending any type of school at the time of the interview (Table 1). The fathers were more likely to

be out of school than were the non-fathers ($P < .001$). Of those fathers who were not attending school at the time of their interview, fifty-six percent of them, as opposed to none of the non-fathers, had dropped out, that is, completed less than 12 years of school and were not attending any type of school at the time of their interview.

With regard to religiosity, it will be recalled that the subjects' religiosity was measured through the question: "Are you an active member of any church?" Fewer fathers (23%) than non-fathers (38%) responded yes to this question. The difference in their responses, however, was not statistically significant. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the fathers' religious involvement tended to be within media forms, while the non-fathers' religious involvement tended to be within institutionalized religious groups.

Contraception Use Variable

A marked difference was observed between the young fathers and their controls with regard to contraception use (Table 4). The fathers were shown to be much less inclined to use contraceptives during sexual intercourse than were their counterparts ($p < .001$). "I don't want too" or "I don't like them" was the most popular response given by the fathers for not using contraceptives when they had sex.

Table 4 About Here

Contraceptors and Non-Contraceptors

The contraceptive users when compared with the non-contraceptive users, regardless of fatherhood status, were

more likely to believe in the use of birth control, to believe that condoms prevented unwanted pregnancies, and they were, slightly more likely to be active church members. They were, however, considerably less likely to believe that one can do very little to change their life or to believe that it is mostly luck if one succeeds or gets ahead. Further analysis of these data revealed that non-contraceptors were more likely to have negative attitudes toward the practice of birth control, and these attitudes were likely to be associated with a belief in luck and a lack of faith in one's power to influence one's life.

Discriminant Analysis

Using linear discriminant function analysis, the author tested the ability of the selected social and psychological variables to discriminate between those who were unmarried adolescent fathers and those who were not. There was significant separation between the fathers and nonfathers on the predictor variables shown in Table 5 (λ = 0.62; Canoncial Correlation = 0.61; χ^2 - 44.14; P < .0001). The variable that contributed most to the differentiation betweeen the fathers and their controls was school status (or educational achievement), that is, whether the subject was attending any type of school at the time of the interview.

Table 5 About Here

As a check of the adequacy of these variables in discriminating between single adolescent males who become fathers and those who do not, the author used discriminant analysis as a classification technique. It has been pointed out that by

classifying the cases use to derive the discriminant function in the first place and comparing predicted group membership with actual group membership, one can empirically measure the success in discrimination by observing the proportion of correct classification (Nie et al., 1975). The results of the classification analyses are illustrated in Table 6. It will be observed that 77% of the "grouped" cases were classified correctly. Despite this strong showing, these selected variables explained only 37% of the variance in predicting unmarried adolescent fatherhood. The Amount of variance explained by this set of variables was obtained by squaring the Canonical Correlation coefficient 0.61.

Table 6 About Here

Discussion

This paper presents data on the differences between unmarried Black adolescent fathers and their controls and on the differences between contraceptors and non-contraceptors irrespective of their fatherhood status. The differences between the fathers and their controls are minimal, and are only infrequently significant statistically. The ones that are significant suggest that unmarried Black adolescent fathers are more likely to have an external locus of control, to drop out of school, and to be employed. The results of this study are consistent with those from Card and Wise (1978), in which they pointed out that boys who father a child during adolescence achieve less formal education than do classmates who postpone parenthood; and the notion that

parenthood causes teenage boys to enter the labor force earlier than their peers (Elster and Panzarine, 1981).

The new and important findings offered in this research concern those of locus of control and contraception use. The absence of feeling in control of one's destiny was more likely to be associated with non-contraceptors than with contraceptors. This finding supports the work of both MacDonald (1970) and Meyerowitz and Malev (1973). Their findings suggested that those with external orientations are less likely to practice birth control. Moreover, through a linear discriminant function analysis, it was revealed that Black adolescent males, who are non-contraceptors, are more likely as well to not believe in the use of birth control, to not believe that condoms help prevent unwanted pregnancies, and to not be church goers. Additionally, it was shown through this analysis, that if you know a Black adolescent male's locus of control, belief regarding the use of birth control, belief on whether condoms prevent unwanted pregnancies, and church attendance, you can predict whether he is likely to be a contraceptor or a non-contraceptor.

Even though several of the social and psychological variables that are often thought to have a major influence on adolescent childbearing were entered in this multivartiate analysis, it is important to recognize that they explained only a modest portion of the variance in discriminating between fathers and non-fathers (37%). This finding suggests that a host of variables influence unwed adolescent fatherhood and the interrelationships among them are complex. The point here is that the total variance of the risk indicators of single adolescent fatherhood appears to be

spread thinly across many antecedent variables, some of which have been discovered, many of which have not. In pursuing other potentially strong antecedents of unmarried Black adolescent fatherhood in future multivariate studies, researchers should include in their investigations the study of such variables as the frequency of sexual intercourse, use of alcohol and drugs, peer-group pressure, and the male's girlfriend's attitude and knowledge about sexual intercourse, contraception, and abortion.

Weaknesses exist in this research that limit its generalizability. The data may be biased for the following reasons: the subjects were selected in a nonprobability manner; they were paid for their interview; and the sample size is small. Finally, the questionnaire items used to measure the study variables tended to be global and imprecise, so that caution must be used in the application of terms and concepts. Nevertheless, important implications to reduce the incidence of unwed Black adolescent fatherhood is indicated by this research. The implications for policy from this investigation are that unmarried Black adolescent fathers should be given birth control counseling, and if other forms of counseling are warranted, attention should be paid to the issues of locus of control.

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TABLE 1

Percent Distribution of Select Socio-Demographic Traits of The Young Fathers and Their Controls

TRAITS	FATHERS		NONFATHERS		
	N	%	N	%	P-Value[a]
Years of School Completed					
< 12	31	65	36	72	
≥ 12	17	35	14	28	NS[b]
School Status[c]					
Attending School	21	44	42	84	
Not Attending School	27	56	8	16	.001
Employment Status					
Employed	27	56	18	36	.04
Not Employed	21	44	32	64	
Presence of Father In Home					
Present	29	60	35	70	NS
Not Present	19	40	15	30	
Active Church Member					
Yes	11	23	19	38	NS
No	37	77	31	62	
Sisters Who Are Unwed Mothers					
Yes	25	52	20	40	NS
No	23	48	30	60	
Brothers Who Are Unwed Fathers					
Yes	17	35	23	46	NS
No	31	65	27	54	

[a] P-Value arrived at through caculation of the Chi-square statistic.

[b] Not significant statistically.

[c] School status at the time of the interview.

TABLE 2

Mean Comparisions Among Select Study Characteristics
of The Young Fathers and Their Controls

CHARACTERISTICS	FATHERS		NONFATHERS		
	MEAN	S.D.[a]	MEAN	S.D.	P-VALUE
Age	16.6[b]	1.6	16.7	1.9	NS[c]
Age at First Sexual Intercourse with a Girl	11.4	3.1	10.8	3.4	NS
Family Size[d]	5.8	2.3	5.9	2.9	NS

[a]Standard deviation.

[b]Age of the young father at the birth (or conception) of his first child.

[c]Not significant statistically.

[d]Family size as used here refers to the number of children in the family of origin of the subjects.

TABLE 3

Measurement of External Locus of Control of The Young Fathers and Their Controls

A. Do you feel that you can do very little to change your life?

RESPONSE	FATHERS		NONFATHERS	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	27	56	16	32
No	21	44	34	68

$X^2 = 5.85$, df = 1, $P < .05$

B. Do you feel it is mostly luck if one succeeds or gets ahead?

RESPONSE	FATHERS		NONFATHERS	
	N	%	N	%
YES	27	56	9	18
NO	21	44	41	82

$X^2 = 15.42$, df = 1, $P < .001$

TABLE 4
Percent Distribution According To Whether Respondents Use Contraceptives When They Have Sexual Intercourse

CONTRACEPTIVE USE	FATHERS		NONFATHERS	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	13	27	33	66
No	35	73	17	34

$X^2 = 14.89$, df = 1, P <.001

TABLE 5

Discriminant Function Analysis for Discriminating Between The Unmarried Adolescent Fathers and Their Controls

Variable	Standardized Discriminant Functions Coefficients	P-Value[a]
School Status	0.6774	< .001
Active Church Membership	0.4004	< .001
Can Do Little To Change Life	0.3668	.01
Trusting To Luck	0.4192	.001
Contraception Use	0.3921	.01

[a] Level of significance (F-Test).

TABLE 6

Classification Results for Predicting Unmarried Adolescent Fatherhood

			Predicted Group Membership			
			1		2	
Actual Group		N	N	%	N	%
Group 1 Father		48	36	75	12	25
Group 2 Nonfather		50	10	20	40	80

Percent of "Grouped" Cases Classified Correctly: 77.55%